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MARK TWAIN'S SATAN

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL, 1970

Thesis
1970 F
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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

The undersigned certify that they have read, and
recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a
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degree of Master of Arts.

ABSTRACT

Criticism of Twain's later works is often a subjective explanation of his writing in the light of his personal life, which projects an image of a humourist turned sour, forging his "symbols of despair." The figure of the satanic stranger who frequently appears in these works, however, is not solely a vehicle for Twain's pessimism nor exclusively a product of his last years. Satan is a focus for many characters and themes which concern Twain throughout his career. This thesis examines three works in which the satanic figure, implied or explicit, appears in several guises as a very human Satan.

Chapter I places Satan in the context of other outsiders and strangers in Twain's work. Chapter II considers the limitations of Twain's use of Satan in "Letters from the Earth" as a spokesman for his disillusionment with humanity. Chapters III, IV, and V see "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" and The Mysterious Stranger as versions of the same story which define Satan more completely.

Everything human is pathetic. The secret source of Humor itself is not joy but sorrow. There is no humor in heaven.

Mark Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson's New Calendar*

"Irony is so unjust; never could abide irony; something satanic about irony. God defend me from Irony, and satire, his bosom friend."

Melville, The Confidence-Man

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I THE OUTSIDER	1
II THE SUPERNATURAL SPECTATOR: "LETTERS FROM THE EARTH"	11
III THE TRICKSTER: "THE MAN THAT CORRUPTED HADLEYBURG"	27
IV THE DARK ANGEL: <u>THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER</u>	41
V THOSE EXTRAORDINARY TWINS	63
FOOTNOTES	73
BIBLIOGRAPHY	79

CHAPTER ONE

THE OUTSIDER

In "Concerning the Jews" Mark Twain states his respect for a figure who has always fascinated him:

I have no special regard for Satan; but I can at least claim that I have no prejudice against him. It may even be that I lean a little his way, on account of his not having a fair show. All religions issue bibles against him, and say the most injurious things about him, but we never hear his side. . . . A person who has for untold centuries maintained the imposing position of spiritual head of four-fifths of the human race, and political head of the whole of it, must be granted the possession of executive abilities of the loftiest order.¹

Assuming an association with Satan as a fellow antagonist to the official bourgeois American culture, and eventually to the entire human race, Mark Twain writes friendly letters to Satan and caustic letters signed by Satan to boards of business firms and to the earth. Samuel Clemens cultivated his own literary legend as 'Mark Twain' -- humorist, rebel against genteel literary tradition and exposer of hypocrisy and cowardice among the race of mean little men. In his efforts to conceive of a persona through whom he can present his emotions and judgements, Twain frequently chooses Satan as a sign that his satiric sensibilities are at work and Satan is often a thinly masked spokesman for Twain's own ideas. It is ironic, but not surprising for a man as prone to self-dramatization as Clemens, that the fictional persona of Satan is often interchangeable with the

literary persona of Mark Twain. This thesis will not provide a comprehensive study of Twain's use of Satan, but will define the satanic figure in "Letters from the Earth," "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg," and The Mysterious Stranger.

Twain's use of Satan is not consistent, and there is no reason why it should be. Generally, Satan is a minor comic figure in essays and stories. The modern Satan, says Twain, enters without "thunder crash or brimstone stench," as gracefully as a stage actor with a cape and rapier, and "on his intellectual face the well-known and high-bred Mephistophelian smile."² In "Sold to Satan," the author decides to sell his soul when steel stocks are down. But when souls are low also, and when he meets the jaunty devil glowing green and made of radium, he proposes to make his fortune marketing Satan instead. As a satiric persona, Satan frequently reciprocates men's interest in him with his scrutiny of topical issues, American politics and business, and the race in general. On the other hand, he is posed as man's ally against God, and in a passage from his diary he expresses his sympathy for Adam and Eve "That Day in Eden" when he reluctantly revealed to those unwitting children of God how they could acquire knowledge of the Moral Sense and hence call the miseries of the world upon themselves. This inconsistency in Satan's point of view in the minor writings remains an ambiguity of the satanic figure in later works, particularly The Mysterious Stranger, where Twain utilizes the literary possibilities of Satan more fully as a fictional character. Whatever function he serves, we may take Satan's judgments to be close to Twain's own. Through Satan Twain is alternately critical and compassionate, raging at men with the indignation that

is a measure of his disappointment with their pathetic idiocies and his compassion for their suffering.

Especially in the later part of Twain's career in the 1890's and following when he was elaborating his proverb of "the damned human race," Satan frequently appears in various guises in Twain's "mythology of . . . gloom,"³ notably in "Letters from the Earth," "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" and The Mysterious Stranger. Bernard DeVoto examines the experiences in Twain's life during these years to suggest why Satan was a particularly useful literary figure to him at this time. After the collapse of his publishing ventures, the failure of his investments in the Paige typesetting machine, and the death of his daughter and his wife, Twain entered a period when he compulsively turned out drifts of manuscripts, many of them unfinished, to alleviate his sense of loss and guilt. Many critics have recorded his inability to produce anything in what they call his "period of despair" which matches his earlier creative achievements. The series of disasters and the sense of failure as a writer drove Twain almost to insanity, says DeVoto:

And this was a fruitful time to remember Satan, for Satan is an angel and angels are exempt from guilt and conscience and self-condemnation also, . . . and neither humiliation nor death nor the suffering of anyone affects them in the least.⁴

Satan's detachment and blasphemies do not simply bar him from respectability, but from all human emotion. Therefore, Satan both expresses Twain's despair and provides immunity from it. Through Satan's impersonality Twain tries to achieve a balanced, detached,

sane view of humanity.

Since Twain uses Satan in most cases as a figure of rebellion rather than evil, one might say that Twain's Satan has participated in the Romantic rehabilitation of the traditional devil. Like other nineteenth century satanic figures he has lost his horror and is a symbol of the protest against tyranny, in heaven and on earth, of freedom of thought, and of humanity unbound. As Leslie Fiedler points out,

[the satanic figure comes] to stand for the lonely individual (the writer himself!) challenging the mores of bourgeois society, making patent to all men the ill-kept secret that the codes by which they live are archaic survivals without point or power.⁵

Of course, Satan does not take a Promethean stand as a champion of the human race. Instead he is often scornful of men and of their institutions, which they have invented to enslave themselves. In "Letters from the Earth" there are no lonely heroes among the men whom Satan observes in his investigations of the race, only weak and slavish masses who are unaware of their condition and powerless to change it. At the same time as he is man's advocate against God and all the other afflictions of the race, Satan satirically exposes the darkness of the mad and violent lives of mankind. The dilemma is that men cannot see to change themselves, and Satan, or Mark Twain, though wise satirists, cannot change them. In The Mysterious Stranger, however, Satan does emerge as one who is free from the follies of the race, who watches the sufferings and absurdities of men with detachment, and who indicates how men themselves can be free from

their deceptions.

The central myth of much of Twain's writing is that of a stranger involved in or entering a society which has a set of values and a point of view markedly different from his own.⁶ Early in Twain's career in his travel books, the stranger appears as the innocent abroad in tired, dirty Europe and as the tenderfoot roughing it in the West. Unencumbered by the society's beliefs and follies, he can satirize them. The confrontation of the perceptions of the outsider with those of the community to which he comes creates a double vision which is basic aesthetically and thematically to Twain's work, for the interplay of the two points of view provides the ironies, the humour, and the tension which holds his work together. Moreover, the stranger's presence reveals the contradictions at the heart of the community, and forces the reader (and often the community itself) to perceive the discrepancies between appearance and reality. In works such as Huckleberry Finn and Roughing It Mark Twain is not wholly committed to the illusions of either the outsider or the community, and treats both with irony, an irony which becomes a pronounced ambivalence where Satan assumes the outsider's stance. However, the confrontation is invariably a protest against the society, and any 'truth' that may be asserted by the author is generally borne by the stranger of keen perception and ethical sensibilities superior to those of the community.

The outsiders may be close to Twain in many respects, but all the same, they are not always identifiable with him. In the

first place, they take on a variety of guises and ambiguous moral implications. Moreover, they are actors in the fiction, and Twain, as an artist, is well aware of their ironies.

The Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's court, for example, a precursor of Twain's explicitly satanic figures, is an outsider by virtue of the time lapse between industrial America and sixth century England, but he is not the man of reason or humanity or morality in a wholly contemptible community. "Here I was," Hank boasts, "a giant among pygmies, a man among children, a master intelligence among intellectual moles."⁷ He is shocked by the aristocracy's casual indifference to human life; disillusioned, he once expresses a misanthropic wish to hang the race and finish the farce. But the Yankee is not always the author. Twain claims in his Autobiography that he has contrasted "the English life of the whole of the Middle Ages, with the life of modern Christendom and modern civilization -- to the advantage of the latter, of course."⁸ But he has not, and D. H. Lawrence's advice might be applied to Twain's case: "Never trust the artist; trust the tale." When Hank brings nineteenth century technology, democracy, newspapers and Gatling guns to bear upon Camelot, he destroys it. Despite the thirteen century gain in civilization, the Yankee is a destructive intruder among the "quaintest and simplest and trustingest race."⁹

H. N. Smith categorizes two kinds of outsiders in Twain's works. In Huckleberry Finn Twain views the depravity of the village and the confining respectability of civilization through the innocent

eye of a youthful pariah. Huck sees with the vernacular point of view, to use Smith's term,¹⁰ of those outsiders who make spontaneous, intuitive common sense judgements, and who are threatened by and in conflict with the codes of official culture and conscience. In later works in particular, a "transcendent figure" appears who is estranged from the community not by his refreshing, wise naiveté, but by his intellectual superiority or some extraordinary capabilities, by his arrogance and contempt for the villagers.¹¹ Smith examines the appearance of both kinds of outsiders in Huckleberry Finn where Mark Twain consistently maintains Huck's point of view except for one instance in which he identifies himself with Colonel Sherburn. When the gentleman Sherburn shoots down drunken Boggs in the street, Huck is a sympathetic witness to the murder. Later, however, Sherburn appears in a more favourable light, and stands alone on a porch roof, a strong individual facing the mob that has come to lynch him. With "an adult aggressiveness foreign to Huck's character," Sherburn berates the mob for its cowardice and meanness.¹² Huck rather enjoys the shabby examples of humanity whom he meets on his journey among thieves and frauds; although the King and the Duke deserve to be railroaded out of town, he is sorry to see them go. But Sherburn denounces the mob with unmitigated contempt. Twain assumes both the vernacular and the transcendent points of view for satiric purposes, but only the vernacular character exemplifies a value system antagonistic to the dominant culture; the transcendent figure, on the other hand, generally mocks all values with his sarcasm without providing

alternatives.

To accept Smith's categories for the moment, the implicit satanic figures are identified by their transcendent point of view -- a perspective of emotional and often physical distance which shrinks men in size and significance. Seeing from a distance becomes seeing clearly and objectively. From the porch roof Colonel Sherburn denounces the mob that comes to lynch him; in "Tom Sawyer Abroad," from a balloon over the Sahara, Tom and Huck watch ant-sized marauders massacre a caravan; and in "Letters from the Earth" with god-like objectivity Satan laughs at the race of human vermin. Twain often plays with distortions of size and perspective as a satiric device. "30,000 Years Among the Microbes" is the bizarre tale of a man who is turned into a cholera germ but retains his human sensibilities. In an unfinished story called by Twain's editors "The Great Dark," Mr. Edwards falls asleep over his microscope and sails a nightmare voyage over uncharted frozen seas. On board is an enigmatic supernatural figure called the Superintendent of Dreams, who plays tricks on the crew much like Twain's capricious God and his satanic trickster, and who tries to persuade Edwards that the voyage is, in fact, real. Frequently, Twain has the impression of men as "microscopic trichina concealed in the blood of some vast creature's veins."¹³ In The Mysterious Stranger Satan diminishes men to the insignificance of a colony of ants; and in "Tom Sawyer Abroad" Tom observes that the superiority of the human race is purely one of size:

"S'pose you could cultivate a flea up to the size of a man, and keep his natural smartness a-growing and a-growing right along up, bigger and bigger, and keener and keener, in the same proportion -- where'd the human race be, do you reckon? That flea would be President of the United States, and you couldn't any more prevent it than you can prevent lightning."¹⁴

The analogy between men and insects in which men suffer by comparison is the language of cynicism. When Twain adopts a persona who reduces the dignity and sensibilities of human nature in this way, one is reminded of H. N. Smith's suggestion that in The Mysterious Stranger Twain "clearly intends to adopt the perspective of a transcendent observer in order to depict human experience as meaningless."¹⁵ But Twain's view of human nature does not simply reduce to Satan's gesture of smashing the miniature race he has created, and in that book, Satan emerges from the Twainian gloom to accomplish more positive things.

The outsider, then, is not adequately accounted for as a misanthrope. Just as Huck Finn discloses that the adult, slaveholding, Christian society prays a lie, the outsider's presence in a community functions not only to chastise but to reveal the ironies and contradictions of human nature and society. Pudd'nhead Wilson, for example, a transcendent figure by Smith's definition, is an intelligent lawyer who earns his nickname because his ironical jokes and his strange interest in collecting fingerprints are misunderstood by the simple citizens of Dawson's Landing. In a melodramatic, eleventh hour courtroom scene, Wilson makes use of his hobby to expose the identity of a vicious murderer and at the same time the

miscegenation and interchange of the negro and white babies in their cradles years before. Like the shadowy sleuth in "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg," Wilson exposes the contradictions which Twain spells out in black and white terms of pre-Civil War America. As F. R. Leavis points out,

It can hardly be said, when we close the book, that the worst in human nature has not been confronted; yet the upshot of the whole is neither to judge mankind to be contemptible nor to condemn civilization.¹⁶

Rather, Pudd'nhead Wilson shows Twain's concern "with the complexities of both human nature and civilization as represented in a historical community."¹⁷ The same could be said of The Mysterious Stranger where Satan is not simply an instrument of derision but of revelation.

If Twain's own acerbic proclamations were conclusive evidence, his position might be simply that

[man] was not made for any useful purpose, for the reason that he hasn't served any; that he was most likely not even made intentionally; and that his working himself up out of the oyster bed to his present position was probably matter of surprise and regret to the Creator.¹⁸

Or, in a characteristic statement from Pudd'nhead Wilson's New Calendar, "Pity is for the living; envy is for the dead." But for final authority on Twain's view, as Leavis reminds us,¹⁹ again one must counter Mark Twain's own maxims with another: "Never trust the artist; trust the tale." The problem when we turn first to "Letters from the Earth," however, is that Satan is too often speaking the words of a bitter and sentimental Twain rather than as an imaginative voice in an imaginative tale.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SUPERNATURAL SPECTATOR

With bravado Mark Twain begins "Letters from the Earth" with a parody of the creation and a satire on God. The introduction to the letters burlesques conjectures about heaven -- the archangels as high as God's ankle-bone, the solemn godly voice from the throne, the supreme magician himself who shoots forth thoughts which become planets and stars. Satan, with a good supply of courage, declares to the archangels that he is not impressed by God's creation. During his subsequent exile he explains why in a series of letters from the earth. Mark Twain identifies himself with the shrewd observer, an outcast from heaven and an alien on earth, to explain why he too says no to the Human Race Experiment. Satan is the incarnation of Mark Twain's wistful claim to the right to stop the world and get off.

In "Letters" the stranger is the ultimate outsider, Satan, and the community he observes is the whole human race. Where Twain has the problem of presenting a criticism of all men and God as well, a human stranger is not sufficient to deliver the blanket castigation because no man complacent in his community's illusions could be trusted to deplore its hypocrisy and brutality.¹ For, as Twain says, "the skin of every man contains a slave." What Satan attacks are illusions and assumptions so basic to the community of men, or at

least to nineteenth century official culture, that only an ostensibly supernatural stranger is free from them and dares to expose them. Man who is at best a "low grade nickel-plated angel" has always had a false evaluation of his own virtue and significance and has "found nobody among all his race to laugh at it" (7).² It is Satan who utters a superior devastating laugh.

As Gladys Bellamy suggests, Satan is a "tool for Twain's habitual condemnation of the human race."³ Satan condemns, however, not with Huck Finn's naiveté, but as one who himself seems to have capitulated to the disenchanted adult world he observes. Satan does not experience the inner torments of making moral decisions because he is not involved in the community enough to feel the pressures of values which conflict with his own. Nor does he respond compassionately towards mere human beings. Because he is non-human, his stance is frightening and cynical, and he looks down on the spectacle of life on earth with tolerant amusement and contempt. The narrator, then, is not a naif, for Mark Twain no longer looks at the world afresh every morning but with the cold adult eye of Satan who voices the realization that the enchantment of childhood and the village can no longer be evoked to redeem the race.

Twain makes little exploration of the character of his persona, for Satan is only vaguely individual. He has the characteristics of a science-fiction immortal -- he is ageless, he visits the stars, and he enjoys century-long sexual ecstasies. But Twain does not insist upon these fantastic touches, and Satan is often a very human devil.

While he denies his kinship with the race by claiming freedom from the defining feature of man, the Moral Sense, at times he is very much aware of what is unjust and immoral; his judgements and his response to the miseries of men are distinctly human reactions.

Usually, the attitude of the narrator is that of a gentleman traveller who ranges casually throughout history and the Bible to observe men's puny capacities and catalogue their infirmities. He is cool and rational, claiming to be untouched emotionally by the incredible events he sees on earth. At times, however, he lapses into an informal manner when Twain takes him less seriously, and many of his observations are those of an obtuse comic narrator treating Bible stories the way the innocent abroad treats history. In the fifth letter, for example, where Twain takes liberties with the Noah story in a farcical version of the problems with the ark, Satan becomes a practical Yankee, eager to report the suppressed business details of the venture, and pointing out God's incompetence in designing an ark too small to accommodate all the animals and in choosing a farmer to sail it.

The use of a persona generally signifies that Mark Twain's comic sensibility is at work, for his humour depends upon a point of view that is sharply restricted, detached and consistently maintained.⁴ To the extent to which Twain can treat his narrator with irony, as he treats Huck Finn, "Letters" achieves a mordant humour. However, Satan has no well-defined identity as an imaginative character, and Twain does not maintain a consistent narrative point of view, nor an ironic

stance to Satan. We do not always see the object of attack through the eyes of the equitable persona. Often, Twain deserts his persona altogether and without the calm detachment necessary for satire, he erupts in tedious sarcasm. When Satan speaks of man's slavery to authoritarian institutions or disease or God, the outraged moralist in Twain is aroused, and he yells out his own shrill responses in the reader's ear.

It would seem that from the perspective of the cynical outcast from heaven Twain could ideally assault both God and mankind, and certainly he identifies with his narrator more than he does not. Nevertheless, the disparities in the conception of Satan and the shifts in the narrative point of view throughout the "Letters" indicates that Satan does not completely embody Twain's vision of men. By holding men at arm's length to see them clearly Satan limits his understanding of men because he never discovers the dignity that can emerge in direct experience with them. While Twain is not at all good-natured about the meanness of the race, he has a compassion which is lacking in Satan's judgements.

Satan, then, is not a fully conceived persona but a tool, a spokesman for several ideas which Twain reiterates throughout his later works. The determinism which Twain outlines in what he called his Gospel, What is Man?, also underlies his description of the earth in "Letters" although in a more imaginative and humourous context. The value of creation does not personally concern Satan as much as its new significant feature -- the "automatic, unsupervised, self-

regulating law for the government of those myriads of whirling and racing suns and worlds" (4). While the archangels marvel at the intricacies of the earth, with the intellectual's attitude to the creator none of them except Satan will venture an opinion on the production. Satan observes that men, like rabbits and spiders, must obey the law of their nature, the god-given temperament which makes them good or evil from birth. Thus, he absolves them from either praise or blame, for the responsibility for men's actions must lie with the creator of things as they are. The result of absolving men from responsibility is not to mitigate the condemnation of them, but to reduce them to helpless victims of God and circumstance. In the terms of such a philosophy, human efforts become meaningless.

Twain sees the world as a machine (in The Mysterious Stranger Satan neatly turns it into a dream without substantially changing his judgement of it). The mechanistic comments in the introduction to the letters remind one of Melville's letter to Hawthorne which seems to express Twain's position:

I stand for the heart. To the dogs with the head! I had rather be a fool with heart, than Jupiter Olympus with his head. The reason the mass of men fear God, and at bottom dislike Him, is because they rather distrust His heart, and fancy Him all brain like a watch.⁵

The curious thing about "Letters" in which the satanic figure observes men in their automatic, unsupervised universe, is that no one, not even Satan himself, stands for the heart. At least there is no Huck Finn, no one independent in God's efficient mechanical creation.

The fallacy of this determinism and the criticism of God is that if man is not responsible for his actions, there is no reason either to berate him or to urge him, as Twain does in What Is Man?, to "Diligently train your ideals upwards." Gladys Bellamy points out the conflict between determinism and moralism throughout Twain's work, and James Cox suggests that Twain's inability to coordinate his criticism of man and God "may very well have been at the heart of [his] failure during this entire phase of his career."⁶ Sherwood Cummings, on the other hand, suggests that Twain's determinism "comes through more as a means of unfolding the thematic ironies than as a conviction about the state of man."⁷ In any case, although Twain's insights may be contradictory or naive as philosophy, his attacks are aggressive and vigorous. As he says in The Mysterious Stranger, laughter not philosophy is the best weapon.

Satan takes Twain's conventional stand against middle class culture and against the Church. In the second letter, Twain points out the hilarious absurdities of the official Protestant heaven which simply parodies the distasteful virtues of gentility. In the first place, heaven is derivative; its inventor obviously "copied it from the show-ceremonies of some sorry little sovereign state up in the back settlements of the Orient somewhere" (11). Worse, heaven is dull. Given what the sane white man enjoys, Satan finds it inexplicable that none of his fondest delights are found in the place which he eagerly anticipates as his eternal home. Men prize copulation and hate noise, yet the heaven they imagine for themselves constitutes

the bedlam of a Protestant pep rally with singing and gritty harp playing but no sex. Satan wonders what can be said for the human intellect when men believe they will be happy in the eternal tedium of Church. Men fabricate a heaven for public display which reflects neither their joys nor terror, but officially approved platitudes and the paucity of their imagination.

When Satan turns from heaven to earth he observes that "the people are all insane, the other animals are all insane, the earth is insane" (7). The world in "Letters" is one where the rules by which men live are meaningless, where a lunatic god is deaf to their prayers. Although Twain formulates no philosophy of an absurd world, he describes the condition of the race in images of violence and terror. In fascinating detail Satan catalogues the miseries caused by the fly, God's "misery-messenger and death agent," and the microbes singing happily in men's bowels; or he invents an incident about sea monsters which threaten to swamp Noah's ark; or he relates Bible stories of God's rapes and massacres. Half-way between terror and laughter, the grotesque images can be a kind of demonic technique to shock, to question familiar standards, and to disaffiliate oneself from a vile world. But at bottom, Twain's relish for the grisly details of man's suffering often seems sentimental.⁸ In recounting the Noah story, Satan pities

the multitude of weeping fathers and mothers and frightened little children who were clinging to the wave-washed rocks in the pouring rain and lifting imploring prayers to an All-Just and All-Forgiving and All-Pitying Being who had never answered a prayer since those crags were builded. . . . (25)

Such passages, which fall far short of satire, are tedious amplifications of Pudd'nhead Wilson's maxim, "Pity is for the living, envy is for the dead."

In presenting his vision of an illogical, violent world Twain returns often to the sinister and ridiculous figure of God who is the genuinely demonic figure of "Letters." Religion projects human desires and freedoms onto devils, but it is a mad god who rules the earth as Satan sees it. The idea which generates such a deity is a familiar one: the world is so full of misery and injustices that if God exists, he must be malevolent. For the most part Twain dwells on God's role as the malignant antagonist in his version of the Eden story. Adam and Eve were not to blame, yet God punished them irrationally:

... a wild nightmare of vengefulness has possessed him ever since, and he has almost bankrupted his native ingenuities in inventing pains and miseries and humiliations and heartbreaks wherewith to embitter the brief lives of Adam's descendants. (28)

The Jekyll and Hyde nature of this God, as Twain says in his Notebook,⁹ further exposes the contradictions latent in Christian society:

The Beatitudes and the quoted chapters from Numbers and Deuteronomy ought always to be read from the pulpit together; then the congregation would get an all-round view of Our Father in Heaven. Yet not in a single instance have I ever known a clergyman to do this. (55)

Twain does not incorporate all the facets of the deity into one consistent concept, but Satan's opinion of him, like that of Melville's Queequeg, is that he is one damn Injun.

Mark Twain once wrote to his brother that he admired "the Arch-Fiend's terrible energy" in Paradise Lost.¹⁰ In "Letters," however, it is God who has destructive power and energy, and for sheer spectacle, to which Twain was always prone, the divine wrath is unmatchable. Twain is as fascinated with God's violence as Theodor is with Satan's destruction of the little race of men in The Mysterious Stranger. "Letters" exemplifies what Leslie Fiedler claims is Twain's obsession with violence:

Twain's attitude toward violence is finally as complicated, subtle, and deliberately ambiguous as his attitude toward sex is naive, sentimentalized, and hopelessly evasive. He is not only the creator of childhood idylls but a great poet of violence; and, indeed, even his humor depends upon a world in which there is neither a stable order nor civil peace.¹¹

At the same time as Satan may deplore God's irrational fury, Twain admires God's energy more than effete Christian piety. Where religion has become simply genteel convention, violence is almost admirable. Moreover, while God's assaults may not be morally just if men are not responsible for their nature, given the weak and slavish condition of the race, they deserve them.

Should the blood-drenched history, the obscenities and lies that comprise the Bible, Satan wonders, be attributed to the mad God or to men themselves? He claims he is equally disenchanted with both, but "for the sake of tranquillity, let us take a side. Let us join forces with the people and put the whole ungracious burden upon him -- heaven, hell, Bible and all" (14). Apparently reversing his initial condemnation of men, in the seventh letter Twain speaks out on several

topical issues, praising one Dr. Charles Wardell Stiles and Rockefeller as defenders of the diseased and poor, and insisting that men are loving creatures at heart;

There isn't a man in the world who doesn't pity that poor black sufferer, and there isn't a man that wouldn't make him whole if he could. To find the one person who has no pity for him you must go to heaven. . . . (36)

Yet in defense of man, Twain only blames providence. Satan may take a rhetorical position on the side of the underdog, but his analysis strips man of all dignity and never demonstrates that he is anything but a desperate victim in a world over which he has no control.

But at the same time as Twain explains evil by attributing it to God and institutions, Satan points out that man himself has invented these crushing afflictions. He has fabricated his own tyrannous God, and now without a smile, calls him a loving Father:

It is as I tell you. He equips the Creator with every trait that goes to the making of a fiend, and then arrives at the conclusion that a fiend and a father are the same thing! Yet he would deny that a malevolent lunatic and a Sunday school superintendent are essentially the same. What do you think of the human mind? I mean, in case you think there is a human mind. (30)

As Fiedler remarks about the American Gothic writers among whom he includes Mark Twain, beneath their images of darkness and violence

lurks the realization that the "tyranny of superstition," far from being the fabrication of a Machiavellian priesthood, was a projection of a profound inner insecurity and guilt, a hidden world of nightmare. . . . The final horrors. . . are neither gods nor demons, but intimate aspects of our own minds.¹²

When man projects his own violence on God and worships that God, the human mind falls prey to its own fear and guilt.

Men are also enslaved by their own institutions and moral codes because for Twain, their independence and their very identity are threatened by training in their social environment. Although Twain is very much concerned with the ethical evaluations of the good heart, he attacks the morality of the twisted conscience. In rather orthodox terms, Twain points out that the consciousness of sin entered the world that day in Eden when Adam and Eve acquired the Moral Sense which men believe is an invaluable possession but which is actually the "parent of all immoralities":

Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, and at once a great light streamed into their dim heads. . . . knowledge that there was such a thing as good, and such a thing as evil, and how to do evil. . . and suffer for it. (17)

The Church perpetuates the fatal Moral Sense, and hence the fall recurs in every child born "naked, unashamed and clean of mind" when his Christian mother soils his mind with moral assumptions. According to Twain, since moral conventions are social they are false, and are preserved only by the artificial suppression of natural, healthy instinct.

Satan reasons that to demand the same exacting standards of sexual behaviour from men and women of all ages is cruelly harsh to the young and an unnecessary admonition to the old. He demonstrates the disparity between the facts of human nature and genteel conduct,

between what men enjoy and what they approve. Twain ostensibly defends man's inherent and therefore blameless lust, but in the eighth letter in which Satan computes the amazing sexual capacities of men, and surprisingly for Twain, women, Twain ridicules men's pursuit of their chief delight. In Twain's mythology Adam and Eve gave up the pleasures of the garden for the one boon of maturity, but from the way in which Satan ridicules the body, it hardly seems worth the loss of innocence.

Twain's case against the Moral Sense is no hymn to the joys of passion; "Letters" is as reticent about sexuality as the boy books or portrayals of fair maidens. Rather, his point is that sex, like smoking in "The Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut," is uncomfortably restricted by social standards and conscience. In this story, the conscience, the tormenting devil himself, appears in the form of a moldy green dwarf to harrass the smoker in the name of his Maiden Aunt Mary, that is, morality. The smoker simply slays his conscience and henceforth enjoys his cigar.

In regard to Twain's rejection of the Moral Sense, James Cox suggests that Huck Finn is not rebelling against a specific political ethic or a morality which he believes is false and tyrannous in order to adopt an alternate one; rather, he flees from all moral categories because they are uncomfortable. His journey "is primarily a negation" and his "central mode of being is that of escape and evasion."¹³ The book attacks all conscience, northern or southern, 'social' or 'inner':

In every case the conscience, whether it comes from society or from some apparent inner realm, is an agent of aggression -- aggression against the self or against another. Either the means or the excuse by which pain is inflicted, the conscience is both law and duty, erasing the possibility of choice and thereby constraining its victims to a necessary and irrevocable course of action.¹⁴

Killing the conscience stops Aunt Mary's harping and protects one from the inner torments of conflicting values by declaring one's independence from social codes. The object is not to replace the old institutions with new ones which would in turn become oppressive, but to escape them all. Twain's Satan, a kind of chastising conscience himself, has ostensibly escaped from all human society by claiming freedom from the Moral Sense, but in the "Letters" the only escape for men which Satan can suggest in turn is the relief of death.

Satan uses history itself to prove that "the skin of every man contains a slave." He traces the source of men's suffering to the Fall, the Flood, and the beginning of Christianity which give him an opportunity to chastise God for deranging human history at these points. There are, from time to time, chances for men to improve themselves, but in each case the promise of a new start is not fulfilled because of the incorrigible nature of mankind. After the Fall, as men diligently practised their supreme art, the world became populated with a race of men who dissatisfied their creator because their morals were "an unflatteringly close imitation of his own" (26). Since God knew of no way to reform men, Satan suggests, he judiciously decided to abolish them in the Flood. But he carelessly allowed a business sample of the race to survive, and when

the rains stopped, Noah alighted and the remnants of the race began to repeat former wrongs. If God foresaw after the Flood that the miseries of men's lives would continue, Satan reasons, he must be stupid and immoral to allow men to live; were he moral and wise, he would let them die. When Jesus was sent to try to improve man's lot, he brought more misery, for Christ, "hard and ungentle enough for all godlike purposes even before he became a Christian," was the inventor of hell.

Hence, Twain's image of history is a cycle of disgraces which cannot be escaped or changed. In the Old Testament God often punished whole nations for the indiscretions of a few, the innocent as well as the guilty. Satan assures us that today, if the sons of New York should commit whoredom with the daughters of New Jersey, only the guilty parties would be hanged at city hall by the mobs:

. . . they would get a rope and hunt for the corespondents, and if they couldn't find them they would lynch a nigger.

Things have greatly improved since the Almighty's time. (46)

With this delicious irony Twain reveals that civilization does not civilize, for no man-made law can overpower that law planted in man at birth, "Thou shalt kill." He reveals too, that God's actions are the epitome of "all the different kinds of cruelty the brutal human talent has ever invented" (54). The attacks on God are attacks on man whose history "in all ages is red with blood, and bitter with hate, and stained with cruelties" (51). In "Letters" history is not the idyllic past of boyhood; it is hell.

The ideas which Twain expresses in "Letters" are voiced by the satanic figure in other works, The Mysterious Stranger in particular, but the significance of Satan is often not what he says but where he stands to say it. From his position of superiority and emotional detachment Satan proposes in the spirit of the vindictive God himself, that the world would be tidier without men. Satan shocks the reader in a rather arbitrary and dry way just as Theodor is shocked by the beautiful angel's murder of the miniature race in The Mysterious Stranger. Like Satan Huck Finn is ashamed of many things men do, and he too has no intention of enlightening the society he tries to escape. Yet Huck never loses his ability to respond to the mean men he encounters on the shores of the Mississippi; Satan simply dismisses them.

In "Letters," then, Twain has created no sympathetic, imaginative consciousness for his narrator and hence no convincing, imaginative fictive world. He uses Satan to expose brutality, misery, and the contradictions of Christian society. So completely has Satan punctured every subject of his appraisal with his cold humour, that the letters are cut off abruptly without having convinced us that Satan is, in fact, superior to or freer than those he observes, and without satisfying our longing for a resolution. Satan's detachment, the attacks on God and man, and the grotesque images make "Letters" less horrifying than rather empty.

As Roy Male points out in a comparison of several American stories involving the figure of a mysterious stranger, the stranger

generally comes to subvert the complacency of an ignorant and corrupt society that badly needs his wisdom, and he leaves the society changed. In "Letters," however, where Satan stands outside the social order to see men clearly, he never meets them face to face. While he has the knowledge of a potential teacher and emancipator, he comes to the earth solely to observe from the wings, grinning and raging at the human spectacle. Satan's letters are sent back to heaven, not to earth to expose men to their own nature and to make them become what they think they are. Satan's failure is not simply rhetorical; Twain believed, says Paul Baender, that "the polarity between society and outsider represented an actual split between public opinion and the facts of life."¹⁵ Of the outsider in "Letters," at least, this is true. Since Satan communicates his scathing comments only to the reader, the teaching process of the satire within the context of the fiction is short-circuited.

CHAPTER THREE

THE TRICKSTER

It is one thing for Gulliver to abhor all things human, but if the misanthropist became angry enough to come galloping out of his stable, what could he say to convince men themselves that they are wrong? In "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" the misanthropic stranger does return to the community he scorns, one which has fallen short of its potential decencies, and while he comes for revenge, that revenge awakens the citizens to a sense of their own depravity so that they see themselves from his point of view.

A mysterious devil-stranger comes to a locked-in community of pious and exemplary Christian souls sunning themselves in their envied reputation for commerical incorruptibility. But Hadleyburg's honesty is a deceptive appearance. The town's virtue is the result of the sheltered education of the youth: "throughout the formative years temptations were kept out of the way of the young people, so that their honesty could have every chance to harden and solidify, and become a part of their very bone."¹ Serenely self-righteous, the citizens of Hadleyburg maintain an unclouded self-image. Sufficient unto themselves, they "cared not a rap for strangers and their opinions," and unwisely offended "a bitter man and revengeful" (2). Months later, the stranger returns to the village

in revenge for this unnamed offense. His design to corrupt Hadleyburg the incorruptible is no dastardly scheme to sully its purity because the town is already stingy, mean, and narrow. What he in fact corrupts is the town's vanity in its reputation, and hence, makes it more honest than before. He exposes the depravity of a society which mistakes boiler-iron commercial scruples for religion and virtue. For societies no more than individuals can pray a lie, as Huck Finn says, without someday suffering the consequences.

A student of human folly, as all successful confidence men and devil-strangers must be, he knows where to strike for revenge, as he explains to the stupified citizens in his letter read at the town meeting:

"Any other man would have been content to kill one or two of you and call it square, but to me that would have been a trivial revenge. . . . I wanted to damage every man in the place, and every woman -- and not in their bodies or in their estate, but in their vanity -- the place where feeble and foolish people are most vulnerable. So I disguised myself and came back and studied you. . . . I am hoping to eternally and everlasting squelch your vanity and give Hadleyburg a new renown. . . ." (52-53).

Moreover, he knows how to strike. To beguile the deceived people of Hadleyburg into an awareness of truths about themselves he comes in masquerade, and makes his exposure in a sensational hoax. By dazzling foolish men with money, flattery and sensation he catches them unaware, and his clandestine attack is graceful and bitter.

The stranger is that recurring figure in Twain's works of the confidence man who is the shrewd, self-reliant Yankee in one of his several metamorphoses as Daniel Hoffman points out in his study

of the folk hero in American romances.² Avatars of the Yankee peddler and trickster, charlatans and showmen reappear in Twain's works from his first successful story in which a stranger wins a bet by loading Jim Smiley's jumping frog with leadshot to Huck's Duke and King who can always find the quickest route to the pocketbooks of any audience or congregation. The charlatan astounds the ignorant with his convincing performance and invites confidence with his flattery and reassuring appearance. Such a figure is as often an apt vehicle for satire as he is a satiric target because the success of his hoax defines the follies of the deceived.

The Hadleyburg stranger is one of the long cloak and slouch hat variety of Mark Twain's shifty, slightly foreign figures, and he looks like "an amateur detective gotten up as an impossible English earl" (56). And like other theatrical foreigners with an aura of mystery, he is accorded the willing belief of men who thrive on the promise of money and sensation. His histrionics are subdued, however, unlike those of Hank Morgan, the Connecticut Yankee who is intoxicated by his own clever "effects," and the stranger's hoax is strictly a functional one for revenge purposes. He remains unobtrusive after initiating a plot which explodes in one tour de force after another.

Into the very parlor of one of the town's incorruptibles, Richards the old bank cashier, the stranger delivers Mark Twain's stock seductress, the fiendish sack of gold coins,³ with instructions to give it to the man who can prove by a test remark that he had

once befriended the stranger. News of this token of trust in Hadleyburg's honesty circulates, and all America acclaims the town's phenomenal purity. The villager's second reaction after vanity is covert curiosity about what the remark might have been. At night, husbands and wives lie awake trying to recall imaginary good deeds as they rationalize their claim to the sack. By delivering the temptation into their midst, the stranger has encouraged their vanity with his seeming trust: "This is an honest town, an incorruptible town, and I know I can trust it without fear" (4), he says. However, for the very reason that he cannot trust the town, he knows that his hoax will be successful, for nothing will prevent those already deceived about their own virtue from being deceived again. While the stranger is no supernatural, his knowledge of the deceptions which blind the citizens from his previous experience at their hands gives him the power to dupe them. The villagers assume that the stranger and his compliment are genuine because they want to be deceived about both their own and the stranger's honesty -- both are sham.

It is no surprise to the reader that the town's honesty is sham; at the outset Mark Twain's ironic tone lets us in on the narrow virtues of Hadleyburg. Nor is it a surprise to the villagers themselves, for at the same time as they polish their reputation and privately gloat over the gold, they sense the irony, and confessions of even worse lapses emerge. The whole town agrees that only "the best-hated man in Hadleyburg," a dead man, Barclay Goodson, would have

been generous enough to give twenty dollars to a stranger. "Everybody will grant that, Edward," Mary Richards tells her husband, "--grant it privately, anyway" (7). Moreover, Richards confesses an instance of his cowardice in deference to public opinion. When the Hadleyburg mob turned on the Reverend Burgess for some outrageous but unspecified offense, Richards reluctantly warned him, risking public disapproval, as Huck Finn protects Jim and risks hell. But Richards would not prove publically, as he could have, that Burgess was innocent of the crime, so the minister is virtually unfrocked by the false accusations. With the knowledge of such ignominy, Mary Richards is prophetically uneasy about the town's honesty:

"It is a mean town, a hard, stingy town, and hasn't a virtue in the world but this honesty it is so celebrated for and so conceited about; and so help me, I do believe that if ever the day comes that its honesty falls under great temptation, its grand reputation will go to ruin like a house of cards." (16)

The fact that they are aware of their deficiencies even before the stranger comes to the town means that he is more than an instrument for the exposure of folly. Gladys Bellamy says "there is determinist motivation through force of circumstance in the guise of 'the stranger',⁴ an interpretation of his role which is correct insofar as he engineers a situation which tries the town's virtue, knowing all the time that it will not stand. Certainly, she hits upon the nature of Mark Twain's determinism which frequently emerges in his works after his back-porch philosophy has spent itself in contradictions, as simply circumstance.

The stranger is never more than a shadowy presence in the

town. While his outline is fleshed out by his revenge motive (more characteristic of Mark Twain's God than his Satan), there is a great difference between the stranger's brief appearances to oversee his hoax and the more binding relationship between Satan and Theodor in The Mysterious Stranger. There the meagre plot which hangs on the money sack device is gradually forgotten and the significant hoax is Satan's relationship with the three boys of the village. "Hadleyburg" is totally a story of plot. Nevertheless, both the stranger and Satan perform similar functions by similar means because "Hadleyburg" is more than an exposé of greed and the stranger more than the instrument for its disclosure. Both Satan and the stranger are chastisers of deceived people who do not acknowledge their deceptions, and both manipulate people without compassion or hatred, unlike the traditional Satan. Just as Theodor projects his half-conscious doubts in the form of Satan long enough to be chastised by him and to reabsorb his doubts intellectually, so the people of Hadleyburg, while they do not create their own teacher, welcome the stranger's hoax which makes explicit what they have already suspected about themselves. Albeit unconsciously, the town wants to be deceived by the stranger because through his exposure they can confess their guilt.⁵

Before the stranger appears, Hadleyburg has already heard from the bearers of its communal conscience -- a misanthropist, a pariah, and a scoffer who together with the stranger establish the outsider position against those villagers who belong by virtue of their delusions. The stranger brings nothing new from the outside;

he describes what he finds inside the village, and confirms what Hadleyburg's own outcasts are aware of. The stranger merely echoes their protest against respectable values in his test remark: "Go and reform -- or, mark my words -- some day, for your sins, you will die and go to hell or Hadleyburg -- TRY AND MAKE IT THE FORMER" (39). Barclay Goodson protested that "he wasn't hankering to follow Hadleyburg to heaven!" when Richards attempted to convert him. In retrospect Richards persuades himself that it was he who saved Goodson from marrying a girl with a spoonful of Negro blood in her veins after which Goodson became a soured bachelor and "a frank despiser of the human species" (27). Reverend Burgess is the town's Christian without a congregation who endures his ostracism quietly. Openly irreverent of the town's pretensions is the ne'er-dowell, Jack Halliday, who "always noticed everything; and always made fun of it, too, no matter what it was" (19).

All three men criticize the town, but they would remain unheeded were it not for the stranger. For what they all know, the stranger puts into action. This adult power to act identifies him more than any sinister gothic trappings as the satanic aggressor in a world where passive innocents are deluded and defenseless against him. He is the black magician making his criticism potent by plotting hoaxes, or performing miracles, or manipulating the course of men's lives, or creating and destroying a miniature race, or any of those artistic achievements with which Mark Twain's satanic figures relieve a frustrated misanthropy and convince men that they are wrong.

As a result of the hoax, the villagers invert their social

order in self-satire and give the outsiders positions of trust.⁶ They have already admitted that Goodson was the only good man among them, they have acknowledged the stranger's request that Burgess chair the meeting and finally, in the joyful mood that accompanies the revelation of the hoax, they appoint Jack Halliday to auction off the sack of bogus coins. A wise satanic stranger who instigates a hoax and teaches men to laugh is the comic artist himself. He can teach where others fail, not because he is wiser, but because the delight and efficacy of learning is in the teacher's performance. The stranger, of course, is never funny, but using the hoax as exemplum he teaches men to join him in wise laughter at themselves -- the laughter that shatters sham and signals the objectivity that accompanies self-awareness.

Neither "Hadleyburg" nor The Mysterious Stranger are satires or venomous denunciations of the human race ("Letters from the Earth" is both). If the theme of "Hadleyburg" is human bondage, as H. N. Smith construes it to be,⁷ it is not greed which enslaves men, as he suggests, but self-deception. Gladys Bellamy, too, says that "the acquisitive instinct, the greed for wealth. . . is involved in this probing of humanity's frailty,"⁸ but the frailty that the devil-stranger exploits and corrects, is man's tendency to deceive himself. Greed exists, and it is no news to discover that it exists in Hadleyburg. A story written in Mark Twain's allegedly misanthropic period affirms the race's rock-bottom goodness and stupidity. Men are not deliberately cruel; they misunderstand themselves. The paradigm of

the story is that of an individual awakened to himself, and the humanizing experience is accomplished not by society's saviour but by a devil-stranger who works with the humourist's own tools, the confidence tricks of the hoax, masquerade, spectacle, and sheer chalk-talk. The stories which involve the satanic figure are not about his character but about his hoax. "Hadleyburg" and The Mysterious Stranger are not satires, but about satire; the comic artist and moralist Mark Twain writes about the comic artist and teacher Satan.

The stranger's masquerade reveals the extent of the town's own masquerade. No remark was ever made, no sack of gold ever existed. There is no grateful stranger, no honest townsman, no one who can be trusted to be what he appears. Moved to laughter, the villagers survive the disillusionment which makes other men misanthropes. They accept the hoax as those cardboard characters of a moral fable gracefully accept their chastisement, relieved at a bitter lesson deserved and delightfully executed. The town regards the stranger and his hoax, as Melville's Ishmael advises one to view the world in times of adversity, as a vast practical joke, which, in fact, they are. Gaily watching their hollowness exposed, the village hypocrites presumably have been chastened and enjoy a kind of comedic resolution of their experience.

Ironically, it is Burgess, the one Christian, who lectures the villagers on integrity:

"And who is to be the guardian of this noble treasure [the town's honesty] -- the community as a whole? No! The responsibility is individual, not communal. From this day forth each and every one of you is in his own person its special guardian and individually responsible that no harm shall come to it. Do you -- does each of you -- accept this great trust?" (Tumultuous assent.) (33)

For Mark Twain, when money morality, established Christianity, a slave code, or any other community ethic is used to avoid individual responsibility for the painful process of moral growth, they are no more than gigantic, empty hoaxes. In Huckleberry Finn Huck's relationship with Jim teaches him to disobey his 'artificial' conscience, just as the encounters with the devil-stranger teach Theodor and the villagers of Hadleyburg to recognize the true image of themselves which they have distorted. In their experiences with their teachers, these innocents learn to disregard the brutal and polite lies of civilization which make men ignorant of themselves and each other. By learning what has been hidden about themselves they strengthen their individuality, and at the same time, they learn in themselves what all men are, and hence strengthen their community with the race. They break the shams that encapsulate them, that isolate liars from each other.

The town is "stripped of the last rag of its ancient glory" (68), and Mark Twain demonstrates that in whatever magnificent disguise men may appear, when they are stripped they are found inadequate. But he gives Hadleyburg shining new robes to put on -- a new motto to live by after the old ways are destroyed, just as Theodor, left with only the imagination intact, has the hope of recreating a new world

to replace what Satan has declared a hoax. "Lead us into temptation" is the town's new motto, with the irony that by revising the prayer that every Christian prays, the citizens declare the whole Christian ethic impotent. They realize with Mary Richards that petrified honesty is a futile attempt to secure innocence:

"it's been one everlasting training and training and training in honesty -- honesty shielded, from the very cradle, against every possible temptation, and so it's artificial honesty, and weak as water when temptation comes. . . ." (15)

Similarly, in The Mysterious Stranger Theodor realizes that his own knowledge of the race, as well as Satan's, is a baseless opinion in the absence of experience. Of course, one does not immunize oneself against sin with homeopathic doses; rather, the value of experience is that there is a knowledge that comes with no other discipline than sin or at least recognizing one's sin. By being corrupted Hadleyburg is set face to face with itself and thus sanctified.

There are ambiguities, however, about whether the villagers are indeed new men. The tanner and the saddler jeer the leading citizens triumphantly. The stranger "got every last one of them," they smile. And at least one of the incorruptibles goes home unreformed. "Dr." Harkness stamps the picture of his political opponent on the bogus coins and distributes them in the town to divert the shame of the affair from himself. The town, blind again it seems, responds to the ploy, and Harkness wins the election. In future, the villagers will be wary of strangers, but the only reason why they will refrain from being taken in again, we suspect, is fear of a repeat exposure.

If so, they have learned nothing.

Yet the tale neatly concludes that Hadleyburg "is an honest town once more, and the man will have to rise early that catches it napping again," and that moral is meant seriously. The story is a moral fable, and within the outlines of its amazingly complex plot the town has moved from one moral position to another with a certain psychological consistency. Mark Twain has it both ways -- the stranger's method of revenge and instruction has succeeded, and Mark Twain says that the townsmen have changed; but their actions indicate that they have not. As far as the stranger's hoax corrects the town's collective perception of itself it is successful, but it is too much to hope for a communal apocalypse and a wholesale reformation of each man within the town. Men learn individually, not en masse. The last necessary step in the stranger's revenge is the personal apocalypse of Richards, and the inevitable consequences of the stranger's visit are spun out only in him.

The stranger is no joke to Richards. The town feels only the educative sting of the hoax, but Richards feels the stranger's destructive force. The villagers laugh and survive, but Richards is devastated. The most complete revenge, the torments of the secret sin, are saved for him. Burgess has suppressed Richards' letter at the meeting, so he is spared the jeers that bring the glory of the other incorruptibles to a close. He returns home, acclaimed as proof that the town has at least one virtuous man. But he soon learns that "a sin takes on new and real terrors when there seems a chance

that it is going to be found out" (64). Eventually, the fear of exposure changes to horror at his own guilt, and he confesses publicly.

Presumably, "the sober affirmation of Hadleyburg" according to Burhans is that Richards suffers, develops a conscience, confesses, and dies an honest man.¹⁰ But, a blessing in stranger's disguise, the fortunate fall, education by sin and suffering -- with whatever words the lesson of the hoax may be justified it is nonetheless terrifying. No matter how educative, even sanctifying, the stranger may be, he is black. Richards' despair marks him as an innocent man, for to the innocent, sin is never justified and always horrifying especially when it is his own.

In his deathbed babble, Richards makes no mistake about the stranger's identity. The checks delivered to him as a reward for virtue, he says, "came from Satan. I saw the hell-brand on them, and I knew they were sent to betray me to sin" (67). The stranger then is not less a devil for being a teacher. He first encourages, then betrays the town's trust; he encourages, then exposes its pride and greed. No sympathetic and reluctant bringer of light like Twain's Satan in *Eve's Garden*, he comes with guile and contemplates the results of his revenge with an evil joy. He deceives in order to undeceive; his sham is both necessary and painful. From the stranger's point of view his hoax may be for the good, but that makes him no less fatal for Richards. Innocence may be delusion, but its loss is a terrible thing.

In his ambivalence for the Hadleyburg stranger Mark Twain touches on the paradox of morality that Hawthorne explores in The Marble Faun. Kenyon smiles sadly at Hilda's "unworldly and impracticable theory" of purity, and puts it to her that sin "like sorrow, [is] merely an element of human education, through which we struggle to a higher and purer state." But Hilda is shocked: "Do not you perceive what a mockery your creed makes, not only of all religious sentiments, but of moral law?"¹¹ Mark Twain might see Hilda's steel-blade innocence and Hadleyburg's petrified honesty in the same light while he mocks religious sentiments and outlines the education through damnation, but at the same time he is aware of the blackness of his role.

"Hadleyburg" is not primarily an inverted moral fable in which 'good' Christians are punished and the 'diabolic' outcasts are vindicated, but about a hoax and deception. Twain pronounces no moral judgement on the stranger's hoax. It is a necessary enlightenment with terrifying psychological consequences for when the sham is dropped there is no joyful illumination.

Those innocents who have been made to see by their encounter with the stranger achieve a level of awareness beyond that which will allow them to live happily within the community once more. Or, since the figure of learning is a circle, they return to the original self with the improvements won by their experience -- as Theodor is integrated with his alter ego, Satan, and is dissolved into nothingness. Similarly, the price of Richards' self-awareness is death.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DARK ANGEL

In The Mysterious Stranger Mark Twain reiterates the paradigm of the locked-in community and the satanic stranger who violates what appears to be its pastoral peace. The story begins with metaphors of sleep and dreams which conjure up Twain's recurrent dream of the innocent land and which promise an idyl of a St. Petersburg existing securely in a medieval Age of Belief:

Yes, Austria was far from the world, and asleep, and our village was in the middle of that sleep, being in the middle of Austria. It drowsed in peace in the deep privacy of a hilly and woodsy solitude where news from the world hardly ever came to disturb its dreams, and was infinitely content. At its front flowed the tranquil river, its surface painted with cloud forms and reflections of drifting arks and stone boats. . . .¹

But as the sardonic comments of the narrator suggest, the village of Eseldorf, or Assville, is rife with superstition and fear. Here the witch terror flourishes in the name of Christianity, a kindly priest, Father Peter, is charged with "talking around in conversation that God was all good," and the villagers are familiarly ignorant and self-righteous. This fool's paradise is no longer a moral refuge in the security of the past. The dream world has become a nightmare, and conditions are ripe for the visit of a mysterious stranger -- ironically an angel called Satan.

Understandably, Satan first appears to young Theodor and his two friends for Mark Twain's boys are the devil's own. Insofar as The Mysterious Stranger has a plot involving the other villagers, it centers around the sack of gold coins which Satan magically plants in the path of Father Peter and the false theft charge brought against him by an old astrologer. The village provides the setting for Satan's miracles but the lesson of his visit is made clear only to Theodor whom he astounds with his miracles and his views on the human race. As Gladys Bellamy points out, however, Mark Twain "can no longer depend upon his boys for the saving grace."² They can still view a situation with compassion -- but privately -- for they are as fearful of public opinion as their elders. Theodor joins in the stoning of a witch "although in my heart I was sorry for her," he admits, "but. . . if I had not done as the others did it would have been noticed and spoken of" (662). Theodor is no Huck Finn loafing on the shabby margins of society; he is village-trained. Only a vestige of Twain's commitment to boyhood remains in Frau Brandt's address to the crowd which is about to burn her as a heretic: "Pronounce your sentence and let me go; I am tired of your society. . . . We played together once, in long-agone days when we were innocent little creatures. For the sake of that, I forgive you" (657).

Neither Theodor nor Satan play by heart, but like Tom Sawyer, by the book. While the major investment of Twain's ideas is in Satan's cracker-barrel blasphemy and unkind derision of man, Satan does not embody the author's complete moral and emotional values for

he is no exemplar of humanity in an inhuman society. Satan rails against the intellectual assumptions which Theodor shares with the village but he also mocks Theodor's humanitarian feelings as a sentimental attachment to the race. Satan's position is not only anti-village and anti-Christian; he systematically doubts every human thesis which Theodor presents, and casually erodes all values with his laughter. While Satan rejects the village he lacks the warmth and vernacular values which coalesce in the image of society's outcasts, the boy and the slave, drifting down the Mississippi.

According to H. N. Smith, Twain's despair increases and his art declines as the transcendent figure replaces the child as the central character in his works. However, at the same time as the cynical stranger is a major character in the novel, Twain retains the boy as his narrator, not the stranger himself whom he adopts to relate "Letters from the Earth." The narrator is sometimes Twain's mouthpiece, sometimes an old man recalling past events, sometimes the boy describing his adventures in progress, but whatever his inconsistencies the story is Theodor's, not Satan's. While Satan voices the bitterness we expect of him, the narrative point of view itself mitigates the despair of his pronouncements, and suggests that in The Mysterious Stranger despite Twain's professed disillusionment with the race and his damnation of God, his is not a profoundly tortured mind.

The Mysterious Stranger, then, is not primarily a satire on institutions, God, the village, or the follies of human nature, nor simply a negation of those values asserted by vernacular characters

in Twain's earlier work. Again, as in "Hadleyburg," men are no strangers to Satan, and his visit is a kind of return to the human race from which he has dissociated himself. Satan rejects the village, a microcosm of human society, not by escaping it, as the innocent must do in order to survive, but by returning to mock and chastise it as only the satanic stranger can do. Ultimately that is all he can do. The supernatural angel is powerless to uplift human nature; he can only work his magic feats and laugh derisively. However, in this novel while Satan incorporates the attributes of the supernatural spectator and the slippery instrument of revenge upon a village, he is more fully developed as a central character. The mysterious stranger raises questions about his own identity -- who he is, where he comes from and why he disappears. In answering these questions, Twain presents a human Satan whose ambiguities provide the vitality of the novel and whose existence says something about dreams, fictions, and imagination.

Twain is not always explicit about what dreams are. Sometimes they are the insane phantasmagoria of human history, or the self-deceptions and fictions by which life can be borne, or the euphoric feelings which are unattainable in ordinary waking hours. As the opening metaphors of dreams suggest, the story is as much a dream tale as the adventures of the Connecticut Yankee who is hit over the head in a gun factory and wakes up centuries previously in Arthurian England. However, as E. H. Fussell points out, Twain makes distinctions between what is real and what is a dream within

the novel itself,³ and only at the end are we told that the whole story was a dream from the beginning, and in fact, that the stranger and the world itself are Theodor's dream creations.

Strange things happen in a dream world; a supernatural stranger appears to the boys with witchcraft of a "kind never dreamed of before" (635). His appearance is prepared for by the boys' story-teller, old Felix Brandt, who teaches them how to smoke, astonishes them with ghost stories and tells them not to be afraid of roving genial angels. When a beautiful youth strolls up to the boys one morning after such an evening's entertainment, the coincidence alerts the reader that Satan springs from a boy's stimulated imagination, and is a fiction with no objective existence outside the mind.⁴ For the most part he remains invisible to the other villagers, or occasionally appears to them incognito as beautiful Philip Traum. "You see, 'Traum' is German for 'Dream'" (635), and he is, in fact, a dream person.

In a town rife with dealers in enchantment -- a priest, a story teller, a juggler, and an astrologer, Satan is the one efficacious magician who appears and vanishes as he chooses, and who can create real things although he himself is immaterial: "My mind creates! . . . out of the airy nothing which is called Thought. . . . This is the immortal mind" (642). With magic of hocus-pocus he charms the boys with the enviable tricks of a superhuman Bad Boy -- he lights their pipe by breathing fire, reads their minds, and makes the boys spectators in his magic theater of wonders. At other times,

however, his witchcraft is his imagination and the real magic of Satan is conveyed by Twain's frequent references to him as an artist.

Satan does for the boys what Mark Twain does for the reader: "he made things live before you when he told about them. . . and he made us see all these things, and was as if we were on the spot and looking at them with our own eyes" (608). He brings higher voltage thrills of a similar kind as those of Felix Brandt because he has the power of the story-teller to spell-bind his audience with his performance. Moreover, he can inspire mediocre performers with his extraordinary skill. At a village party where he is visible only to the boys, he melts magically into the astrologer's body. The astrologer rushes out to the market square where a juggler is performing, and declares to the crowd: "This poor clown is ignorant of his art. Come forward and see an expert perform" (637). As the old man tosses the balls into the air with stunning dexterity, the villagers watch terrified, distrustful of their own perceptions:

Then that great, pale, silent, solid crowd drew a deep breath and looked into one another's faces as if they said: "Was it real? Did you see it, or was it only I -- and I was dreaming?" (638)

For Mark Twain, Satan's power to confuse reality and enchantment is like the artist's ability to create illusion. The writer himself cons the reader into and in with his fiction; the story-teller turns the listener in the palm of his hand with his performance because the story lies in the manner of its telling. Satan "represents

nothing less than the creative imagination" says James Cox, which he defines as the ability to glamourize reality, to convert the dull world into a play world.⁵ Satan injects excitement into the somnolent village by transforming ordinary reality into beautiful and vivid lies.

When E. H. Eby states that Satan is Twain's personification of the artist, he suggests as well that The Mysterious Stranger is not despairing but a "tribute to the greatness of man's imagination" affirming that "through the imagination's creative power man achieves a kind of divinity and immortality."⁶ But one would hesitate to confront Mark Twain with Eby's romantic insinuations about Satan when one suspects that in Twain's mind a 'divine artist' might resemble the melancholy poetess, Emmeline Grangerford, whom Huck Finn admires. Instead, Twain's literary origins in folk-lore and frontier humour identify Satan, like the elusive Hadleyburg stranger, as another avatar of the con artist, not in motive, but in method. Satan apparently has no motives at all in coming to Eseldorf. Although he is no hypocrite, no patent medicine man out to dupe the yokels, no foxy traveller using his wiles to get along, his art, like the craft of the confidence man, is enchantment. His creative imagination has demonic implications for like the confidence man, magician, and storyteller who control their victim's emotions by virtue of their entralling performance, Satan is in a manipulative mode.

Here embodied in Satan, the creative imagination is implicitly demonic even where it is the prerogative of the boy hero who trans-

forms his surroundings with the magic of his daydreams. In Tom Sawyer's world, Twain indulges the boy's exhibitionist flings. Cox suggests that Tom's creative imagination is his ability to act out his fantasies and to make them 'true,' and to organize other people around them. So successfully does he stage his own glorious death that he can return to the village to watch the whole town turn out for his funeral.⁷

[Tom Sawyer] is no testimonial to the child's unfettered imagination transcending the materialism of the adult world. Instead, it creates existence under the name of pleasure, and portrays all human actions, no matter how "serious," as forms of play. Thus the imagination is shorn of the religious, romantic and transcendental meaning with which Coleridge invested it; in Mark Twain's world of boyhood, the imagination represents the capacity for mimicry, impersonation, make-believe, and play.⁸

In his own book, Tom's play protests the boring adult play which conventionalizes village pieties in school commencements and church. When Tom reappears at the end of Huckleberry Finn, however, the very imagination which made him a winning playful child takes on demonic proportions in his hoax on Jim. Tom's fooling according to the rules of some romance he has memorized degrades Jim as much as the gigantic hoax of the slave society itself. Privately, Huck thinks that Tom's method of freeing Jim is a jackass idea, but he admires his "style," and he does not realize that Tom's casual cruelty is at odds with his own discovery of Jim's dignity in the course of the raft journey. Tom is a show-off and a sensation seeker who stages Jim's liberation for fun. When the show-off plays with an eye to the book, he sacrifices compassion for spectacle.

Another showman, the Connecticut Yankee, delights in working up his "effects" to astonish the ignorant Englishmen, and he knows how to use the magic of science to defeat Merlin's magic of fol-de-rol. Using the power which his ingenious 'miracles' win him to dot the medieval countryside with factories and with knights between sandwich boards advertising soap, he imposes nineteenth century American civilization upon the idyllic barbarism of Camelot. When he turns his civilization loose in his last extravaganza he literally electrifies the flower of knight-errantry and walls himself up in Merlin's cave with twenty-five thousand rotting corpses. The showman is unmasks as a fiend.

Similarly in The Mysterious Stranger Satan is a showman who enacts his miracles with unconscious cruelty "in a quite matter-of-course way and without bitterness," playing for fun with no compulsion either to harm or help his victims. It is not Satan's back-porch blasphemies which convey his demonic element, but his relationship to his living creations. He creates a race of miniature men for the boys' entertainment (a microcosmic world which reinforces the metaphor of Satan as artist), and when he tires of them raises a heavy board from the boys' swing and "mashe[s] all those people into the earth just as if they had been flies" (607).

Satan's destruction of his microcosmic world mirrors God's abuse of men in "Letters" for he resembles Twain's image of the fiendish deity who controls the universe, and the Sunday School conception of the wonderful wizard with power to create and destroy.

When Twain looks at men through Satan's eyes, from a distance, or through a microscope he sees them as a swarm of insects and swats them. His gesture is recognizable as a child's cruel sport with small living things; and DeVoto even suggests that Twain seeks a way out of his frustration with the race by "an identification juvenile at base",⁹ with the dark angel who can perform miracles and has the power to fulfill the Connecticut Yankee's wish to hang the race and finish the farce.

Twain's superior being has an ambiguous mixed nature. To establish his superiority to the human race, Satan insists that he is free from the Moral Sense. Since angels do not distinguish between right and wrong, Satan claims as he squashes the life out of the little quarrelling workmen with bumble-bee voices, "we cannot do wrong; neither have we any disposition to do it, for we do not know what it is." Theodor is aghast because he "had honestly believed he was an angel" (607). So he is, of course, but his angelism is cruel; his innocence is amorality. Claiming freedom from the supreme human vice, he also relinquishes human feeling. Satan's cruelty is the logical conclusion of Twain's frequent attacks on the Moral Sense. Theodor, or Mark Twain speaking, realizes the limitations of an unblemished angel: "no one but an angel could have acted so; but suffering is nothing to them; they do not know what it is, except by hearsay" (659). Satan's superiority is simply the emotional distance from which he views the race. Therefore, he does not despair at the spectacle of man; he laughs "enough to make a person sick to hear him."

To Theodor Satan's objectivity is cruel, and he tries to persuade him to a kinder appraisal of the race. "More than once Seppi and I had tried in a humble and diffident way to convert him," but the glad missionary hope was blighted and they "made no deep impression upon him" (659). The change is only one-way; Theodor is affected by Satan, but Satan is untouched by Theodor's emotional values. The confrontation with Satan recalls Gulliver's confrontation with the rational Houyhnhnms, and Mark Twain, like Swift, defines the reasonable human being as one who changes with his experiences.

There are disparities in the conception of Satan, however, which belie his professed indifference and amorality. When Twain blurs the line between himself and his character to vent his indignation about war, religion, the monarchy and man's brutality, Satan becomes very human indeed. As the occasion demands his tirades take on a moral flavour and he becomes explicitly punitive; he plants the magic tree in the foreigner's garden in India to encourage his greed, then punishes him with life-long torments. Often he sympathizes with the misery of being human, and as a favour to Theodor's friends, makes lethal changes in their life plans. Moreover, he takes Theodor on excursions throughout history to show him the repression and brutality of the human race, and acknowledges by his continued visits to the boy that if he cannot lift up the incorrigible race, at least he can try to make Theodor see it from his own perspective. Ostensibly, Theodor is learning although he is always shocked by Satan's detachment.

Twain is ambivalent to the satanic figure with whom he most frequently identifies himself in The Mysterious Stranger, and while his quarrel is unquestionably with the damned human race, through the eyes of the narrator Twain presents the ironies of the race's most severe critic. Twain is aware of the comedy of Satan's lapses, and presumably his own, into didactic, gratuitous tirades. When Satan takes himself seriously and announces with the confident insolence of Blake's angel that he is "speaking as an expert" on man, Theodor, or Twain, is reminded of the ironies of the claim:

He had never felt a pain or a sorrow, and did not know what they were, in any really informing way. He had no knowledge of them except theoretically -- that is to say, intellectually. And of course that is no good. One can never get any but a loose and ignorant notion of such things except by experience. (656)

Through Satan, Twain hits the commonplace targets of his satire and reiterates the bleak statements from What is Man?, with as little humour, that men are happiness-suffering machines and that events in their lives are determined like a row of falling bricks. If Satan were simply a spokesman for the author in a particularly sour Twainish mood much of The Mysterious Stranger could be dismissed as a fictional restatement of deterministic ideas or as the invective that Twain produced compulsively in his later years. But Satan's satiric function is more important in relation to Theodor, for in effect, if not with compassionate intention, he is the boy's instructor. Satan has no more affection for Theodor than for the rest of the race, but what differentiates him from the sensation

seeker who performs for his own gratification or the fraud who dupes to get along is that in relation to the boy, Satan's manipulative power is not destructive but educative.

Much of Satan's didacticism mystifies Theodor more than it enlightens him, and although he realizes the truth of some of what Satan says, he cannot grasp the whole of his impressive philosophy. Satan's criticism of the Moral Sense, for instance, which Father Peter subsequently defends as man's greatest gift, leaves the boy "with that indefinite sense you have often had of being filled but not fatted" (616). At this point Satan scoffs at certain of Theodor's misconceptions to prepare him for new ideas but he does not yet completely change his point of view or provide him with an alternate creed.

Like Huckleberry Finn, The Mysterious Stranger is an educative book. Ostensibly the narrator is a disillusioned old man (sometimes Theodor, sometimes Mark Twain) recalling the experience that made him so. Twain assumes the familiar stance of the reliable adult relating the progress of the innocent towards the harsh truth at the expense of his romantic illusions, and usually with a gain in personal identity.¹⁰ In Life on the Mississippi Twain relates how his boyish imagination transformed the pilot's life on a cheap and gaudy river-boat into an exotic adventure, and how actual experience on the river shattered its charm. Or as a soldier in "The Private History of a Campaign That Failed" he recalls how the young men whistled off to war until the mud, the retreats, and the grim possibility of death

"took the romance out of the campaign, and turned our dreams of glory into a repulsive nightmare."¹¹ In these works Twain presents the initiation with nostalgia for the dreams in which the boy escapes adult brutality and dullness. Experience intrudes upon the naif's dreamland, and he awakens to find it filled with disappointment.

In The Mysterious Stranger, however, Twain no longer views the disillusionment with nostalgia because Theodor's illusions are not boyish daydreams but delusions which have fogged his understanding of the race, or so Satan tells him. The excursions to torture chambers, factories and the burning-stake expose the corruption of the race to the astounded child. Theodor is disenchanted by his enchanter just as Hadleyburg was awakened by its deceiver.

The paradigm of the hero's experience in The Mysterious Stranger is not a quest but a hoax. Theodor does not steal out of the village to meet the stranger in the dark forest of unfaith by appointment, nor is there a river to carry him out of the village among frauds and thieves. Satan comes to him apparently unsolicited. Happy in the paradise for boys, Theodor could never consciously undertake the clandestine association with the stranger, nor anticipate the results -- naifs never do. Since Theodor has none of the perversity to court evil attractions, nor the impulse which leads Hawthorne's Goodman Brown into the forest at dusk intent upon an evil purpose, he is led all passive and uncomprehending into the center of experience not knowing the identity of his guide, nor what the consequences will be. Naifs and complacent men, mentally locked into

their delusions, will not choose to seek out truths that will make them tremble. The satanic stranger must come to make the truths evident and to set the deceived face to face with himself. Theodor's self-definition is not achieved in adventure for Twain depicts the boy's initiatory experience as a dream and Satan as a dream artist. Theodor goes nowhere, does nothing, and learns everything within the Eseldorf dream world, an enchanted mental traveller with Satan on strange flights of thought.

The stranger's presence in the village functions like the hoax on the tenderfoot in frontier humour as an initiatory experience for the hero,¹² but as a result of the initiation the hero leaves the society instead of accepting it or gaining its acceptance. As R. W. B. Lewis points out in The American Adam, given the nature of the society in which he finds himself, the progress of the hero in American literature is characteristically a movement away from society, a "denitiation."¹³ The movement of Satan and his ideas into Theodor's consciousness is consistent with Theodor's loss of confidence in the goodness of the race, in the trustworthiness of village dogmas and eventually in reality itself.

The experience with Satan involves leaving society because the boys' association with him remains an incommunicable secret. No matter how eager they may be to share their knowledge of him with the villagers, he has sealed their lips -- a supernatural cannot identify himself openly to superstitious witch-hunters. Sharing the secret, the boys dissolve their ties with the village and become

Twain's familiar diabolic outcasts. The boys' isolation is not the result of their moral courage in resisting amassed social pressures, but of a bewitchment. Theodor does not volunteer his confidence in Satan, but as surely as those victims of a confidence man who do, he is ensnared in a situation over which he has no control. In the face of Satan's diabolical acts Theodor dutifully feels that he must turn him in to the law, but of course he is powerless to do so for as he says of his friend, Seppi, "he would not want to offend Satan; he would rather offend all his kin" (627).

At each visit Satan inspires the boys with a strange euphoria:

He made us forget everything; we could only listen to him, and love him, and be his slaves, to do with us as he would. He made us drunk with the joy of being with him, and of looking into the heaven of his eyes, and of feeling the ecstasy that thrilled along our veins from the touch of his hand. (607-608)

While he jars their moral preconceptions with his blasphemies, he captivates them with what Theodor insists must be the bliss of paradise itself so that they cannot resist even when the entertainments turn into visions of hell. They suspend not only their moral judgments of his acts, but their sympathy for the suffering of his victims. Momentarily, they themselves join Satan as demonic spirits in a kind of amoral heaven, the only delightful heaven for Mark Twain:

He was full of bubbling spirits, and as gay as if this were a wedding instead of a fiendish massacre. And he was bent on making us feel as he did, and of course his magic accomplished his desire. . . . In a little while we were dancing on that grave, and he was playing to us on a strange, sweet instrument which he

took out of his pocket; and the music -- but there is no music like that, unless perhaps in heaven, and that was where he brought it from, he said. It made one mad, for pleasure; and we could not take our eyes from him, and the looks that went out of our eyes came from our hearts, and their dumb speech was worship. (609-610)

The boys feel his presence with the intensity of a dream.

The theme of dream and waking states and the confusion between them increasingly preoccupies Twain in his later fiction and autobiographical jottings. An entry in his Notebook defines a dream, "for want of a truthfuler name," as that imaginative flight of "my unhampered spiritualized body"¹⁴ where the mind is disarmed, the intellect is at rest and moral categories disappear. Satan is that dream artist roaming through history and space, an unhampered spiritualized body in the delightful amoral heaven.

In 'My Platonic Sweetheart' a beautiful lover comes to the narrator in his dream. But just as terror is always at the threshold of the village drowsing in sunshine and ghosts haunt the child's imagination, the rapture and release of the dream often become a nightmare. In "The Great Dark," Mr. Edwards falls asleep over his microscope and sails a weird voyage; he is convinced by the Superintendent of Dreams of the reality of what he had hoped was a bad dream. But regardless of the mood of the dream (Theodor experiences both horror and joy), the dreamer experiences it at a more intense pitch than he does ordinary reality. Twain marvels that "everything in a dream is more deep and strong and sharp and real than is ever its pale imitation in the unreal life which is ours when we go

about awake."¹⁵

For Theodor, everything "seemed so tame, after Satan" (615), that his presence becomes an indispensable elixir. Deeply touched, Theodor can only explain the feeling by saying "we loved him." E. S. Fussell describes it as a "low voltage mystic experience,"¹⁶ and Satan is, after all, a mystery perceived as a beautiful spirit. Although Theodor's adoration smacks of adolescent hero worship, under Satan's influence Theodor is transported out of ordinary reality into a dream world. That is the response to beauty, to a lover, to art -- those muses and mirrors of ourselves which inspire both terror and "that kind of quiver that trembles around through you when you are seeing something so strange and enchanting and wonderful that it is just a fearful joy to be alive and look at it" (606).

As in "Letters from the Earth" beautiful Satan conjures up an ugly dream of history. "Would you like to see a history of the progress of the human race?" Satan asks the boys. "You perceive. . . that you have made continual progress. Cain did his murder with a club; . . . the Christian has added guns and gun-powder" (658-659). Staging incidents in Christian history, Satan makes his point explicit:

. . . his theater was at work again, and before our eyes nation after nation drifted by, during two or three centuries, a mighty procession, an endless procession, raging, struggling, wallowing through seas of blood, smothered in battle-smoke through which the flags glinted and the red jets from the cannon darted; and always we heard the thunder of the guns and cries of the dying.

"And what does it amount to?" said Satan, with his evil chuckle. Nothing at all. You gain nothing; you always come out where you went in." (660)

With this bleak statement of civilization as a cycle of disgraces, Twain echoes the Hadleyburg theme that years of training in honesty do not produce an honest individual. Man's depravity repeats itself in every age because history is no teacher.

Although men are slaves to history and to the Moral Sense, there are two effective exits, Satan tells Theodor, insanity and death. As charitable measures Satan changes the sequence of events in the life plans of Theodor's friends so that Nickolas drowns and Father Peter goes insane. However, Satan himself has a mode of existence outside the rhythm of life in history, claiming freedom from history as tradition and as time. Roger Salomon observes the difference between Satan as an "image of escape"¹⁷ from reality and that of Huckleberry Finn. In Huckleberry Finn the combination of the raft, river and child is

"unreal" only in the sense that it describes a reality transcending the flux of empirically centered experience -- a source of values beyond the reach of life in time and history though constantly in conflict with it.¹⁸

Twain rejects these innocent values in The Mysterious Stranger, but he still presents the dream mode of Satan's existence as a beautiful reality while he dismisses the reality of history as an evil dream.

Satan himself advocates an escape like that of Tom Sawyer into fictions and dreams. Wagenknecht notes that Twain distrusts romance as "a specious gilding, a false light thrown over life, an attempt to live by illusion instead of facing the truth."¹⁹ Nevertheless, Satan chides Theodor's distress when Father Peter is

driven mad by the false news that he has been found guilty at the trial: "I have replaced his tin life with a silver-gilt fiction; . . . and you criticize" (671). Satan's statement is irrefutable for illusions are necessary to bear the misery of being human and to survive the vision of the race as he presents it.

The result of Theodor's moments of escape with Satan is that he learns what he has not learned within the village. As Daniel Hoffman observes about American romance writers, among whom he includes Mark Twain, they have a predilection towards the "ahistorical depiction of the individual's discovery of his own identity in a world where his essential self is inviolate and independent of. . . involvements in history."²⁰

Where "denitiation" and self-discovery are Twain's themes it is not surprising that the hero is accompanied on his adventures by a dark comrade -- like Huck and Nigger Jim -- whom white society fears and to whom it denies status. By making friends with the outcast, the hero is drawn away from society and makes a personal discovery in relation to the black man. Leslie Fiedler notes that the black man is the white man's alter ego and mirror image, a brother, or an innocent lover. The symbolic associations of black and white are often reversed. Hence Huck Finn flees from his own white father into the arms of his black angel Jim. The dark angel Satan has an ambiguous dual nature; he is both Theodor's joy and his worst nightmare.

According to Fiedler, the relationship between Theodor and

Satan is a comic diabolic pact, Theodor playing boy-Faust to Satan's boy-demon. Hence, the critic claims, Theodor's situation is never moving, nor can The Mysterious Stranger ever seem serious to the adult mind since Twain was always "a profoundly ignorant man, doomed to sound like the village atheist when he aspired to speak like Faust."²¹ But Theodor is happily bewitched; he does not decide to go to hell in exchange for power or knowledge. Moreover, his relationship with Satan is like that between another pair, Huck and Jim, an educative one.

Satan is merely a "juvenile demon," says Fiedler, "a kind of superhuman Huck Finn who teaches his companions to amuse themselves by making golems and performing minor witchcraft. . . ."²² The N. A. A. C. P. which construes Twain's Jim as Fiedler does his Satan had Huckleberry Finn withdrawn from New York's high school curriculum because, in the words of the novelist Ralph Ellison, "Jim's friendship for Huck comes across as that of a boy for another boy rather than as the friendship of an adult for a junior."²³ On the contrary, argues Daniel Hoffman, Jim is Huck's protector and mentor on his journey, a shaman who teaches Huck about weather lore, folk cures, charms and omens of death, and an exemplar of a simple code of decencies.²⁴ Floating on the river Huck discovers what society has not taught him and acknowledges what its morality forbids -- his love for and kinship with Jim -- and is initiated through his relationship with the slave. In The Mysterious Stranger, although no mutual concern binds the pair together, Theodor grows up

in relation to Satan not only by listening to his ideas but by discovering who he is.

CHAPTER FIVE

THOSE EXTRAORDINARY TWINS

With Satan and Theodor, Mark Twain reiterates the division of his chief character into twin personalities established with Tom and Huck, the prince and the pauper, the extraordinary Italian twins, and Tom Driscoll and Chambers,¹ who represent opposing moral or social positions, as characters of comic writers often do. Twain himself frequently had the impression that he embodied two identities -- one influenced by social pressures, and another which could escape the influence. Thus, a character may be plagued by one who represents a conflicting force within his own mind as Twain suggests in his Notebook entry about "The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut":

That was an attempt to account for our seeming duality -- the presence in us of another person; not a slave of ours but free and independent, and with a character distinctively its own. I made my conscience that other person and it came before me in the form of a malignant dwarf and told me plain things about myself, and shamed me and scoffed at me and derided me.²

An artificial moral code is responsible for the presence of the tormenting dwarf, but Satan who derides morality originates within Theodor's own mind, and presents to him the doubts of his own critical consciousness. Satan and Theodor are the psychological equivalent of twins, for Satan is Theodor's own creation and mirror

image. Thus, Theodor's mixed reaction to him is the fascination and repulsion of the self.

Satan is spawned independently of Theodor's intellect; in his own words he is the creation of "an imagination that is not conscious of its freaks -- in a word, . . . a dream" (676). Theodor is blissfully ignorant of his doubts until they are objectified in Satan. Satan, therefore, seems to be a mysterious stranger because Theodor is not yet aware that he is a projection of his own mind. Both Satan's appearance and his effect on Theodor are beyond the boy's control, for Satan is a thought and thought is not volitional. What the mind forms and what forms the mind are beyond control -- a determinism more frightening than Satan's claim that "each act unfailingly. . . . begets another" (643). Like the scientist's monster or renegade computer, Satan ranges beyond his creator's control to become his master, and Theodor's dilemma is to digest what he has projected so that it does not destroy him. By projecting his doubts long enough to reabsorb them intellectually, Theodor radically changes his own point of view and learns what he was not aware that he already knew.

Before his encounter with Satan Theodor is in the happy state of being well-deceived. Satan takes him on strange flights of thought until he has no choice but to see. Set face to face with the brutality and repression that are the way of the world, he is enlightened and disenchanted. Like Goodman Brown who goes into the forest at dusk naively confident that he can return unchanged to the

arms of Faith in the morning, and instead returns to the village "a stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate man. . . from the night of that fearful dream,"³ Theodor too is changed, for with the experience of Satan behind him he can no longer be deceived. Once made to see, one cannot be blind again. When Theodor at last accepts Satan's creed, "I knew, and realized, that all he had said was true" (676), the knowledge is more appalling than illuminating. From Theodor's naive point of view, Satan is cruel, but from the point of view of one who has been made to see, Satan's objectivity and his scornful laughter may be the only tenable position.

What Theodor learns, like much knowledge as opposed to mere fact, is in the nature of a recognition. Since appearance and reality, masquerade and deception are Twain's major themes, it is not surprising that the last chapter smacks of Tom Sawyer's court-room spectaculars and ends with Satan's revelation of identities -- his own, Theodor's and the world's.

If the novel reminds one of Edgar Allan Poe's preoccupation with the fissure of the mind, the conclusion in particular suggests an analogy with Poe's "William Wilson" where in the masquerade setting of the closing scene, Wilson stabs his antagonist, unmasks him, and recognizes with horror the image of himself. The double whispers: "In me thou didst exist -- and, in my death see by this image, which is thine own, how bitterly thou hast murdered thyself."⁴ At the moment of recognition Wilson and his double are reintegrated

in death. Similarly, Satan unmasks himself to Theodor: "I myself have no existence; I am but a dream -- your dream, creature of your imagination. In a moment you will have realized this, then you will banish me from your visions and I shall dissolve into the nothingness out of which you made me. . ." (675).

The real miracle of The Mysterious Stranger is not Satan's witchcraft, but his disappearance. (Of course, he is not destroyed by disappearing; like all teachers he is perpetuated in his pupil.) Moreover, the whole world disappears. "There is no God, no universe, no human race, no earthly life, no heaven, no hell" (676), Satan declares. When Theodor becomes aware that Satan and the world are ultimately hoaxes, the illusion of their presence is dispelled. They are all "a grotesque and foolish dream" and Theodor is the maker of it. For the first time Theodor recognizes the clear ring of truth in Satan's words: "It was electrical. By God! I had had that very thought a thousand times in my musings" (675).

Of course, Twain hints at the outset that this is a dream tale. The ending is contained in or grows out of the opening metaphors of sleep and dreams in the village of Eseldorf; or perhaps the story has grown out of the ending since Satan claims that Theodor has created the whole dream fiction himself from the start. Although Theodor is supposedly recalling his story, the ending surprises him as much as the reader. It may strike the reader as a revelation of the very hoax to which he himself is subjected when he enters into the fiction of the tale. To both Theodor and the reader, Satan points

out that "the dream-marks are all present; you should have recognized them earlier" (676).

The ending was chosen by Albert Bigelow Paine from among Twain's papers to conclude the unfinished manuscript of the novel, and while most critics accept Paine's edition as the completed work, they are goaded into a flurry of explanations. DeVoto has it that Twain declares his immunity to the catastrophes of his personal life by calling them a dream.⁵ E. S. Fussell suggests that Twain's final philosophical position is a theory of solipsism, that Twain puts "his figures through. . . various progressive phases from unreality (literal materiality) to reality (solipsistic ideality)."⁶ Roger Salomon argues that the ending is a "far cry from solipsism;" Twain declares that human life is meaningless, an "escape as nihilism."⁷ To Fiedler, Twain's position is ludicrously "put forward as a final word of truth, a summary conclusion" which can "never, therefore, seem quite serious to the adult mind."⁸

These explanations rely primarily on Twain's biography or his philosophizing, and instead of accepting all of these or none of these, it is more useful to consider another suggestion by Pascal Covici that the conclusion presents "the hoax as cosmology." He acknowledges that Twain's major themes are masquerade and deception, and that the hoax is always central to his thought:

Life as it is. . . . becomes other than it seems; values taken for granted are exploded; even self evaluation must go by the board as self-delusion. Finally, society itself, and then the universe, become gigantic hoaxes, imposing themselves on credulous man only as long as he will accept them at face value.⁹

Just as the Moral Sense creates the distinction between good and evil so confidence perpetrates the hoax and validates its reality. Nothing is real or unreal but confidence makes it so.

An encounter with a confidence man is a metaphor for a moment of awareness -- for Theodor the most intense moments he experiences. But Theodor's confidence man destroys his confidence, and it seems, Theodor himself. Like Melville's marvellous confidence man who assumes a variety of disguises to dupe a river boat of fools, Satan ultimately proves insubstantial when he reveals his identity. However, Melville's satanic deceiver urges his dupes to trust him, but the message which Satan leaves with Theodor is to have no trust in any appearance which is presented to him as real. Satan even obliterates himself in his final cruel and illuminating demonstration that all external guides, including himself, in which the boy has placed his confidence, are equally untrustworthy.

One of Satan's first acts is to smash his miniature men in a capricious gesture of contempt, but his final word on the race is of a different order; as Kenneth Lynn points out, the destroyer may turn out to be a liberator after all.¹⁰ Satan advocates a comic, detached view of life, for laughter is the weapon available to men to shatter the shams and deceptions which enslave them:

"Power, money, persuasion, supplication, persecution -- these can lift at a colossal humbug -- push it a little -- weaken it a little, century by century; but only laughter can blow it to rags and atoms at a blast." (671)

Since "no sane man can be happy, for to him life is real, and he sees what a fearful thing it is" (670), men must view life with laughter, or in Hesse's words, as a picture-play in a "magic theater for madmen only."¹¹

As a magician, Satan instigates his last show to dissolve the world before Theodor's eyes. Yet the miracle of destruction, as of Satan's presence, is Theodor's own creative achievement. When he learns to see from a new point of view, with Satan's objectivity, the familiar disguise in which the world once appeared is destroyed.

The aim of laughter is not ridicule but understanding and self-awareness, and in this respect Theodor learns to laugh.¹² By recognizing Satan as his own creation he is changed. "And you are not you -- you have no body, no blood, no bones, you are but a thought," Satan remarks, pointing out that Theodor's own existence has been a masquerade from his real identity. "I, your poor servant, have revealed you to yourself and set you free" (675).

The concern with identity and with the transformation of personality, Daniel Hoffman points out, are characteristic of American fiction. In the career of the folk hero, "metamorphosis is always magical, but now, in an egalitarian society, the magic is the power of self-reliance, not of Satan."¹³ Twain invokes a magical mysterious stranger, but the changes he effects are not ultimately of the magic wand; Theodor is self-determined, a supreme magician who changes himself.

The American hero has the freedom to die in each identity

and be reborn in another, says Hoffman; that is, he seldom dies but is transformed. Often his metamorphosis, like that towards which Ben Franklin's self-improvement charts are directed, involves no spiritual change or commitment to new values. In fact, whereas most wandering heroes in European tradition return home to be crowned king, the American naif grows up without maturing into adult society, making an "easy progress from one role to another without ever being compelled to accept the full commitment of spirit to any."¹⁴ Similarly, Theodor is not initiated into the sacred knowledge of the tribe, nor commits himself to the responsibilities of a new social role. The Mysterious Stranger is cut off at the moment of Theodor's awakening when he becomes aware of the distance that exists between his social disguise and what the Connecticut Yankee asserts is "that one microscopic atom in me that is truly me." Theodor's flash of insight terminates the story, and yet the feeling we are left with suggests the conclusion of Melville's The Confidence-Man: "Something further may follow of this Masquerade."¹⁵

Twain does not go free fall into emptiness because Theodor can think away everything except himself. "You will remain a thought," Theodor is told, "the only existent thought, and by your nature inextinguishable, indestructible" (675). Man's imagination, which has "existed, companionless, through all the eternities" (675), remains to create new historical styles. When an old disguise is rent, new clothes begin to grow from the imagination, the source of all disguises, dreams and gilt fictions. "Dream other dreams, and

better," Satan admonishes Theodor, reversing his former thesis that man can create nothing.

Hopefully, once we liberate ourselves from the hellish shams we can create a bright new world. The new dream can in turn become a nightmare, however; witness America. Twain knows that the promised land is most generally a lie, but he is reluctant to abandon the dream of a better life further west. If we could control the imagination we could reach a permanent escape world like Father Peter's escape into madness; but Twain admits that this is impossible in 'My Platonic Sweetheart' where his nostalgia for what was once available to the child and in the past is the wistful dream of an escape only in death.

For everything in a dream is more deep and strong and sharp and real than is ever its pale imitation in the unreal life which is ours when we go about awake and clothed with our artificial selves in this vague and dulltinted artificial world. When we die we shall slough off this cheap intellect perhaps, and go abroad into Dreamland clothed in our real selves, and aggrandized and enriched by the command over the mysterious mental magician who is here not our slave, but only our guest.¹⁶

Even Huck Finn can go too far west, especially when he goes alone, and in Twain's proposal for a sequel to his Adventures, Huck returns from the territory a deranged and bitter old man.¹⁷ Similarly, Theodor hears Satan's words that life is a dream with a "vague, dim, but blessed and hopeful feeling" (675) that they are true, but by the end of his speech it is clear that the liberation which he promises is not a joyful release, but a terrifying freedom.

With Theodor's enlightenment accomplished, the attachment between the master and the pupil can be severed. The "mysterious mental magician" is no longer a satanic master, but the boy's poor servant. Satan and Theodor are two distinct personalities until Theodor understands who Satan is. Just as Huck is poised ready to light out without Jim, Satan fares Theodor forward without historical baggage into "shoreless space, to wander its limitless solitudes without friend or comrade" where he will be "a vagrant thought, . . . wandering forlorn among the empty eternities," more lonesome stranger and homeless orphan than free spirit.

Theodor realizes that he is alone, and he is appalled. Like Gulliver who is so changed by what he has absorbed of the Houyhnhnms that he isolates himself in a stable when he returns home, Theodor's experience irrevocably separates him from other men. Unable to tell where he has been or what he has learned, he has no choice but to be alone. As. R. W. B. Lewis points out about the Adamic figure, in his freedom from all human society he has the tragic implications of losing all human attribute.¹⁸ It is often Huck Finn's feeling that being alone is as good as being dead, and Twain's position at the end of The Mysterious Stranger reflects an ambivalence towards freedom from the insane realities of society. Alone in shoreless space, there is no one to whom Theodor can relate himself; a point of view, consciousness itself, seems impossible -- until the imagination takes on another companionable disguise.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER ONE

¹ Twain, "Concerning the Jews," Complete Essays of Mark Twain, 236-237.

² Twain, "Sold to Satan," Complete Essays of Mark Twain, 650.

³ Parsons, "The Devil and Samuel Clemens," 582.

⁴ DeVoto, Mark Twain at Work, 126.

⁵ Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, 133.

⁶ Salomon, "Mark Twain and Victorian Nostalgia," 73.

⁷ Twain, The Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, Writings, XIV, 66.

⁸ Twain, Autobiography, Chapter 54, 295.

⁹ Spengemann, Mark Twain and the Backwoods Angel, 84.

¹⁰ Smith, Mark Twain, 4.

¹¹ Ibid., 136.

¹² Ibid., 137.

¹³ Twain, Notebook, August 12, 1883, 170.

¹⁴ Twain, "Tom Sawyer Abroad," Writings, XIX, 56.

¹⁵ Smith, Mark Twain, 186.

¹⁶ Leavis, "Pudd'nhead Wilson," 136-137.

¹⁷ Ibid., 132.

¹⁸ Twain, Autobiography, Writings, II, 7.

¹⁹ Leavis, "Pudd'nhead Wilson," 124.

CHAPTER TWO

¹ Baender, "Alias Macfarlane," 193.

² Twain, Letters from the Earth, 7. Page references to this work will be given in parentheses in the text.

³ Bellamy, Mark Twain as a Literary Artist, 329.

⁴ Gerber, "Mark Twain's Use of the Comic Pose," 143.

⁵ Melville, The Letters of Herman Melville, June 1, 1851, 129.

⁶ Cox, Mark Twain: The Fate of Humor, 282.

⁷ Cummings, "What Is Man?: The Scientific Sources," 14.

⁸ Bellamy, Mark Twain as a Literary Artist, 64.

⁹ Twain, Notebook, 392.

¹⁰ Bellamy, Mark Twain as a Literary Artist, 329.

¹¹ Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, 275.

¹² Ibid., 38.

¹³ Cox, Mark Twain: The Fate of Humor, 172-173.

¹⁴ Ibid., 177-178.

¹⁵ Baender, "Alias Macfarlane," 192.

CHAPTER THREE

¹ Twain, "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg," Writings, XXIII, 1. Page references to this book will be given in parentheses in the text.

² Hoffman, Form and Fable in American Literature, 51-53.

³ The quick-rich scheme, to which Mark Twain himself was prone, appears in many works from "The Jumping Frog" to "The \$30,000 Bequest."

⁴ Bellamy, Mark Twain as a Literary Artist, 308.

⁵ Covici, Mark Twain's Humor, 199-201.

⁶ Ibid., 200.

⁷ Smith, Mark Twain, 183.

⁸ Bellamy, Mark Twain as a Literary Artist, 308.

⁹ Covici, Mark Twain's Humor, 197.

¹⁰ Ibid., 384.

¹¹ Hawthorne, The Marble Faun, Chapter L, 350.

CHAPTER FOUR

¹ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, The Complete Short Stories of Mark Twain, 599. Page references to this work will be given in parentheses in the text.

² Bellamy, Mark Twain as a Literary Artist, 361.

³ Fussell, "The Structural Problem of The Mysterious Stranger," 99.

⁴ Tuckey, Mark Twain and Little Satan, 27.

⁵ Cox, Mark Twain: The Fate of Humor, 275.

⁶ Eby, 'Mark Twain's Testament,' 255-256.

⁷ Cox, Mark Twain: The Fate of Humor, 146.

⁸ Ibid., 148.

⁹ DeVoto, Mark Twain at Work, 127. Twain attributes to Satan the sorcerer's miracle of making clay birds fly which was performed by Jesus as a child. He was acquainted with this incident in the 1621 edition of the Apocryphal New Testament. See Mark Twain's Travels with Mr. Brown, 251-252.

¹⁰ Spengemann, Mark Twain and the Backwoods Angel, 10.

¹¹ Twain, "The Private History of a Campaign That Failed," Writings, XV, 271.

¹² Hoffman, Form and Fable in American Fiction, 20.

¹³ Lewis, The American Adam, 115.

¹⁴ Twain, Notebook, 350.

¹⁵ Twain, 'My Platonic Sweetheart,' Writings, XXVII, 304.

¹⁶ Fussell, "The Structural Problem of The Mysterious Stranger," 101.

¹⁷ Salomon, Twain and the Image of History, 206.

¹⁸ Ibid., 206.

¹⁹ Wagenknecht, Mark Twain: The Man and his Work, 104.

²⁰ Hoffman, Form and Fable in American Fiction, x.

²¹ Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, 456-457.

²² Ibid., 457.

²³ Quoted by Hoffman, Form and Fable in American Fiction, 336-337.

²⁴ Ibid., 332.

CHAPTER FIVE

¹ Stone, The Innocent Eye: Childhood in Mark Twain's Imagination, 246.

² Twain, Notebook, 348.

³ Hawthorne, "Young Goodman Brown," Mosses From an Old Manse, 124.

⁴ Poe, "William Wilson," Selected Tales, 144.

⁵ DeVoto, Mark Twain at Work, 125, 130.

⁶ Fussell, "The Structural Problem of The Mysterious Stranger," 102.

⁷ Salomon, Twain and the Image of History, 207.

⁸ Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, 457.

⁹ Covici, Mark Twain's Humor, 216.

¹⁰ Lynn, Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor, 285.

¹¹ Hesse, Steppenwolf, 164.

¹² Covici, Mark Twain's Humor, 215.

¹³ Hoffman, Form and Fable in American Fiction, 88.

¹⁴ Ibid., 78-79.

¹⁵ Melville, The Confidence-Man, 296.

¹⁶ Twain, 'My Platonic Sweetheart,' Writings, XXVII, 304.

¹⁷ Lynn, Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor, 245.

¹⁸ Lewis, The American Adam, 6.

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B29954